



ANCIENT GREECE



THE MYCENAEANS

From about 1600 - 1100 B.C., the mainland of Greece was dominated by a people we called the "Mycenaeans". They lived in small kingdoms, each with its own city. These cities were usually built on areas of high ground and were surrounded by walls to make them easy to defend. This type of fortified city was called an "acropolis" which means "high city".

An acropolis contained a royal palace along with houses for courtiers, soldiers and craftsmen. The palace was also used as a military headquarters, the administrative centre from which the government was run and a workplace for many skilled craftsmen. The palace consisted of a number of buildings, often more than one storey high, grouped around a central courtyard. The palace was brightly painted inside and out. The walls inside were often covered with frescoes.

The palace was the centre of economic life. Large storerooms held agricultural produce and objects produced by the craftsmen were kept here. The Mycenaeans often traded their goods with other countries in the eastern Mediterranean Sea and kept trading posts in important cities along the coasts of Asia Minor and Lebanon.

The Mycenaeans were a very warlike people. Mycenaean soldiers used body armour, helmets and shields made of bronze. Three types of shields were made from oxhide stretched over a wooden frame. Poorer soldiers wore leather tunics and helmets for protection.

A famous Greek poet, "Homer", told a story about the Trojan War. In his story a city called Troy was destroyed by the Mycenaean Greeks, after a ten year siege. For many years historians thought the Trojan War was just a story but at the end of the 19th century A.D., the remains of Troy were discovered in modern Turkey. Many experts now feel that there is some truth in Homer's tale.

The legend tells that the Trojan War between Greece and Troy was caused by a woman named Helen of Sparta. She was very beautiful and was sought after by all the Greek kings who wanted to marry her. Helen married Menelaus, brother of King Agamemnon of Mycenae. Her father made all of her suitors swear an oath to support Menelaus and to help if anyone tried to kidnap Helen.